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Anthrop.  
Archaeol.  
P.

# BURIED OXFORD UNEARTHED,

BEING

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE EXCAVATIONS

UNDERTAKEN BY

The Oxford Architectural and Historical Society,

*DURING AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER,*

1899.

---

BY

FRASER H. PENNY, M.A., ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE.  
iii

With Illustrations from Photographs

BY

W. MANSELL MERRY, M.A., LINCOLN COLLEGE,  
*Vicar of St. Michael's, Oxford.*

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James Parker and Co.,

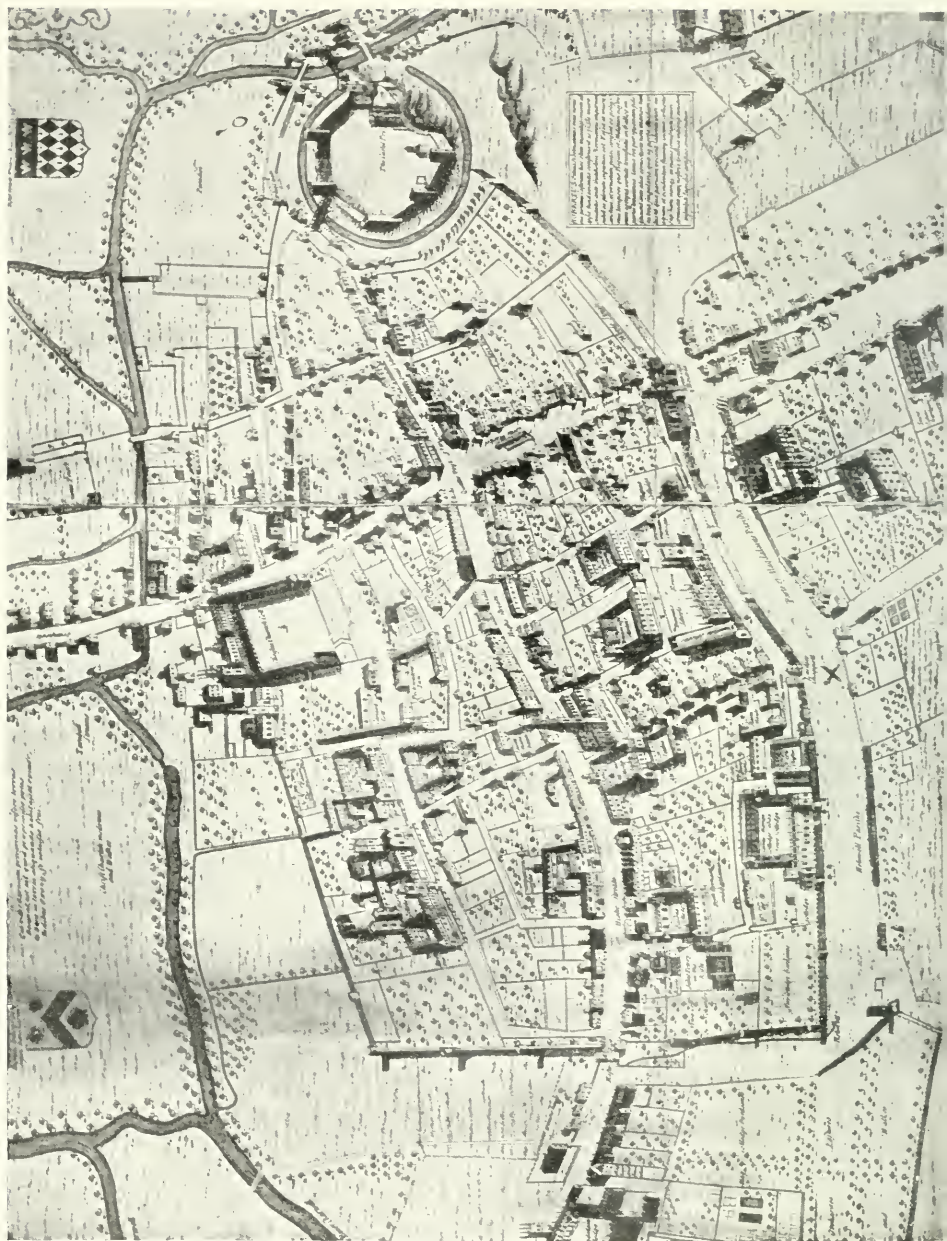
27 BROAD-STREET, OXFORD;

AND 6 SOUTHAMPTON-STREET, STRAND, LONDON.

1899.







Plan of Mediaeval Oxford, from Agas, 1578.

The X marks the Lady Chapel.

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## BURIED OXFORD UNEARTHED,

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IT was the dead of the Long Vacation; the heat of a tropical summer seemed to have dried up almost one's very power of thought; the Parks were parched and brown, deserted by the Undergraduates and given over to nursery-maids and babies; all Oxford was as if sunk in a sleep, from which it would not wake till Term began.

And yet for any of those, who were compelled to stick to their posts, a surprise was in store, which would serve to brighten the remainder of "the Long," at least for those possessed of antiquarian tastes. It was known to a few that the Architectural Society of Oxford had been granted permission by Congregation to carry out certain excavations, but the decree had excited little general notice, and it was only about the middle of August that rumour announced that the researches were about to commence.

The Committee, as originally formed, consisted of Mr. Madan, the President of the Society, Mr. James Parker, and Mr. Herbert Hurst. Two volunteers were associated in the work, Mr. Mansell Merry, Vicar of St. Michael's, and the writer. The tower of St. Michael's at the North Gate is perhaps one of the most striking instances of late Saxon or early Norman work that the country possesses.

Closely adjoining the Church was the "Bocardo," where Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer were imprisoned immediately before their martyrdom, and the fact that the City wall slightly deviates at this point may have been brought about by the necessity of making room for the Northern transept of the Church.

Now before I plunge into my subject, let me state plainly that I can lay no claim to architectural knowledge, but I believe I am right in saying that up to the South wall

of the Sheldonian theatre the City wall can be traced with tolerable certainty.

Here we lose it for a space of some seventy or eighty yards, when it reappears close to what was a Lady Chapel (marked X in Agas' plan), standing near Smith Gate, or, what is now, the corner of New College lane, and thence, after trending Eastward, it emerges in its full glory in the gardens of New College, William of Wykeham's tower occupying the site of an old bastion.

It was this gap between the Sheldonian theatre and the Lady Chapel which the Architectural Society of Oxford were anxious to trace out. And if to the outside world we seem to claim too much attention for our work, let it be borne in mind that this excavation is the first systematic work of the kind, which has been taken in hand here in Oxford, at any rate in this century, and most probably for a hundred years or more before that.

The ground, which we were to open, is an oblong space, running nearly parallel to Broad Street, which was in ancient days the City ditch.

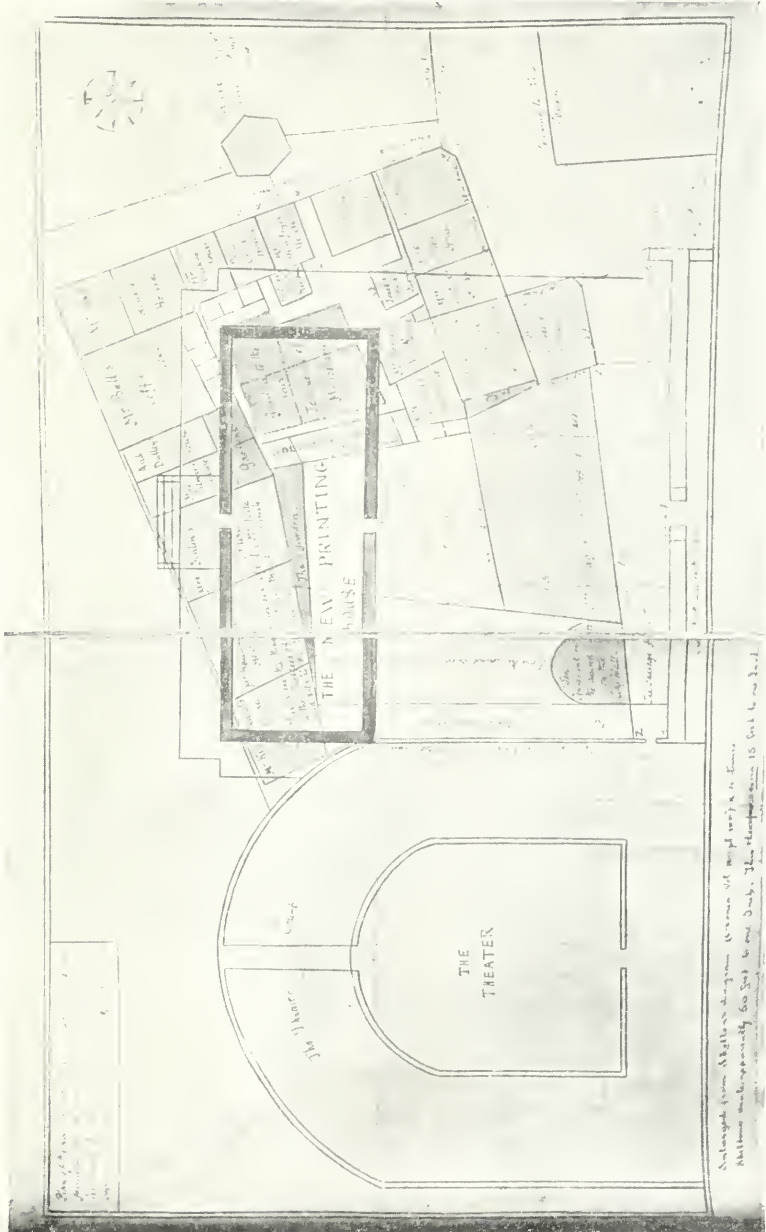
If you take your stand, facing North, you have immediately opposite you the Clarendon Buildings, said to have been built out of the proceeds of the "History of the Great Rebellion"; from a niche over the portico, ever since 1717, the figure of the great Chancellor himself has presided over the structure his genius helped to rear. To your left is the Sheldonian theatre, where are conferred at the end of the Summer term the honorary degrees, and which only three or four months ago rang with cheers for Lord Kitchener of Khartoum and Mr. Cecil Rhodes. To your right lies Hertford College, while immediately behind is the Quadrangle of the Old Schools, where high up on the Bodley tower sits enthroned His Majesty, King James the 1st, in the act of granting to the University the Charter, under which it was to work.

But some practical reader, steeped in the utilitarianism of the present day, may ask, "Why did you think it neces-



# PLATE II.

To face p. 4.



Benjamin Cole's Plan, 1713.



sary to spend money and time to tear up this trim spot? You knew quite enough about the wall already. Is that your reverence for the Queen of Cities?"

And our answer would be that it is those only, who were born here, or have lived a large part of their lives in Oxford, who can ever realise what is the glamour which she casts about her children. We love and honour all that belongs to her; we resent almost as personal insults the insipid wonder of Country Cousins, or the patronage of wealthy Americans, who, while they admire, cannot help adding that "the Colleges seem in bad repair."

And if, on this occasion, we have called up for a few days a frown on the fair brow of Alma Mater by our impertinent questioning, it is only because we do not like secrets to remain unsolved between us, and, when once she has gratified our curiosity, we will leave her again to her stately repose.

Think, too, of what tales those stones we have uncovered for you could tell. To go back no further than the middle of the 16th century, on the walls of this bastion, which we have unearthed, may have stood a crowd, watching the thick cloud of smoke, rising from the City ditch, where, not four hundred yards away, Ridley and Latimer were gasping out their lives in defence of the Protestant faith.

Here, too, while the bells of St. Mary's and Carfax clanged out the good tidings, Town and Gown laid down, for the night at least, their old rivalries, and tossed caps, and drank deep to the health of Queen Bess and her fleet, which had scattered like chaff the Spanish Armada.

Along these ramparts may have paced Charles the 1st, his brow knit, and his face darkened by those "coming events which cast their shadows before." Here, half a century later, may have strolled Antony à Wood, the historian, just returned to Oxford on that autumn evening, fretting and fuming, for only a few days ago his *magnum opus*, the "*Athenae Oxonienses*," the work of his life, has been consigned to the fire by "the order of the Vice-Chancellor, Doctors, Proctors and Masters, in Congregation assembled."

But, if we leave the realm of fancy and descend to fact, this space, which you think we have so defaced by our digging, wore a widely different aspect two centuries ago from that which it presented when we began our work. At that time it was surrounded with small houses, some at least of which would seem to have been built above the broken-down walls of the City.

We have this confirmed to us by a plan, drawn by one Benjamin Cole (see Plate II.), who lived about the year 1713 in a house near what is now the east end of Broad Street. He gives us the names of some of the occupiers of these tenements, and quaint enough they sound to modern ears,—Mr. Wildgoos and Mr. Cuckoo, dwelling on opposite sides of an irregular oblong quadrangle, Mr. Cuckoo at least being true to his name, if he lived in a house built over the old wall and thus occupied a nest not originally intended for him. These small houses must have disappeared, when the Clarendon Buildings were completed in 1717, although the Churchwarden of St. Mary the Virgin, the University Church, tells me that his parish still receives ground rent from the University for one which remained standing, as late as 1740, no doubt, that is, till the lease of the house had run out.

Mr. Cole's plan proved somewhat of a blind guide, as it turned out, but, in default of a better, we started our work by the help of this, bent on solving the vexed question of the course of the City Wall.

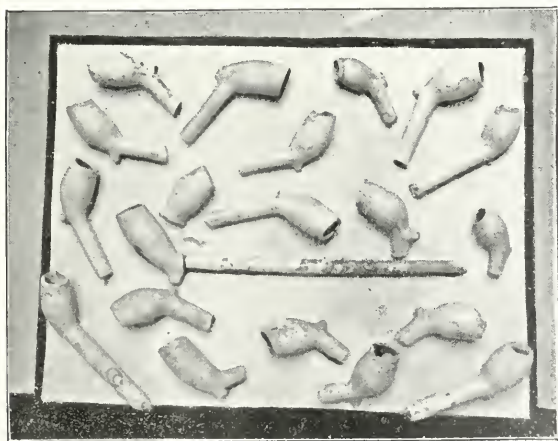
While disclaiming any Architectural knowledge, I think I may venture to say that two theories were suggested; the first that the wall travelled diagonally across the space behind the Clarendon Buildings towards the Lady Chapel (see Plate VII.); the other, that it followed a line nearly due East, and then, turning off almost at right angles to the left, in this way reached the same point. The first theory rested on the rather slender basis that, towards the South East corner of the Clarendon Buildings, a wall had been found not more than a foot below the surface, which it was thought might be the wall we were looking for.

PLATE III.

*To face p. 6.*



The Doorway cut in the Bastion.



Early Tobacco Pipes.



But leaving technicalities, which are always tedious, especially when treated of by a tiro, let us pass on to the actual search.

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The morning of Aug. 21st was lovely, and we could hardly have wished to begin work under better auspices. We had arranged that one of us should always be present during the digging, generally to superintend operations; but this proved quite unnecessary, as time went on, for we could not have wished for two better workmen than were sent us by the well-known firm of Symm and Co. At the commencement, of course, our efforts were tentative, and we sunk more than one trench with little result. It was annoying to find in after days that we must, as early as this, have been within a foot of the top of the old wall, but abandoned the search in that particular spot an hour or two too soon.

It was at last determined to try nearer to the Sheldonian, and so, if possible, strike on the bastion or "round house," as it was called. Here we were more lucky, and about the second day we began to trace out a fine wall shaped like a C standing on its two ends with its apex lying North; and this was held to be one of the objects of our search. But, just as we were on the tip-toe of expectation, in hopes of success, we came across a well-constructed doorway, the stones supporting which were clean and well-defined. It was cut right through the bastion wall, and, strange to say, must have been a divided or double door, for clearly marked in the stone on either side was the groove, in which the hinges had been set (see Plate III.).

If it was a sally-port in the original tower, we should have expected it to open outward, but this could not have been so, for the masonry was so cut as to forbid the possibility. This, I may say, was the first of the many puzzles, which we were to encounter, the solution of which I reserve till later on.

Continuing our search, we next met with a wall, which



had apparently been built up against the bastion, and which through some settlement in the subsoil had slightly given way, so that we could trace inside it the face of the original wall. A little later we came across something, which seemed to be the remains of a fireplace.

All this time the men were throwing out broken pieces of various kinds of pottery, and the clay pipes of the Jacobean days (see Plate III.).

The pipes were of the kind so frequently found in Oxford, thick in the stem and some of them with extraordinarily small bowls; judging from the size, you would say that a few whiffs would have exhausted them, and that the smokers of that day must have used tobacco simply as a narcotic, just as the Chinese and Arabs of the present day inhale opium or Indian hemp. But a friend of mine up here tells me that he has seen the Breton peasants smoking pipes certainly no larger, and that the tobacco they use is a kind of thin twist, about the thickness of a cord; in fact they employ their pipes as holders, for what must resemble a very short stumpy cigar, made of the rankest tobacco.

The fragments of pottery were chiefly the remains of rough vessels suited for kitchen purposes, most of it glazed on one if not both sides; there were two jars of red ware, quite unglazed, which *might* be very early, but were probably Mediæval; portions of soft red clay vessels, coated with a dark glaze, plates and a basin of heavy texture, faced with a thick white glaze of such a brittle nature that it would sometimes separate from the clay body it covered and peel off like an egg-shell.

We found also many remains of a much harder ware, some mottled brown outside and drab coloured within, and some of superior character, which had been decorated and possessed too such beauty of colour in blue and brown maroon, that it was difficult to believe the pieces had lain hidden for two hundred years.

For the benefit of any readers who may take an interest



Spur.



Bottle (about 1680)  
with Bell stamped on it.

Red unglazed Jar.



Tyg, about 1650.

Bellarmine Jug.  
1580 to 1630.

Tyg.



in Pottery or Porcelain, I will state very briefly to what periods these "finds" belonged.

And first in order of date, we must place that brown mottled ware of which we have got so many fragments. You will notice that some of the pieces present grotesque faces, which are called "masks," moulded or stamped just below the neck of the vessel; elsewhere there are coats of arms imprinted on the clay, and generally these pieces of jugs present a hard flinty appearance (see Plate V.). They are in fact stoneware, not pottery, and were partly imported from Flanders, and partly made in England. Their date might be as early as 1580.

In England they were called "Greybeards," and they varied in size from a gallon to a pint. The half-gallon sized jugs were called "pottlepots," but the name by which these jugs generally are known to collectors is "Bellarmines."

It took its rise thus:

During the late period of the Reformation, Robert Bellarmine, one of the greatest controversialists of his time, born in 1542 and created a Cardinal in 1599, seems to have fallen foul of the Protestants generally, Continental and English.

He went on a mission to the Low Countries, and made himself so unpopular there that the angry potters burlesqued him on their jugs. I am afraid that in the somewhat rotund shape there is an unkind reference to the figure of the militant divine, and we are told that he was short and hard featured, which he certainly was, if these portraits are true. He " essayed a fall " with our British Solomon on the subject of Papal supremacy, and came off second best, for James 1st was himself no mean theologian, and on this occasion would have the ablest assistance which English divines, and notably the saintly Andrewes, Bishop of Winchester, could supply.

Perhaps the scorn thrown by the Flemish on one, who had presumed to enter the lists with the King of England, may have helped to make these jugs popular among the English.

The next period we take up is that of the red clay coated with black or dark chocolate glaze, and this is distinctly English pottery. It was made at Jackfield in Shropshire, and dates back, perhaps, to the 16th century. It is said that, on the opening of a coal pit a few years ago, which had been closed for two centuries, a mug was found of this ware bearing date 1634.

The quaintly shaped drinking-cups, of which a picture is given, were called "Tygs" (see Plate IV.). When a "Tyg" had only two handles, it was used for a hasty draught, such as a stirrup-cup; when it had three or even four handles, it was used by toppers, who sat down for a more lengthy carouse, and as each of the party had his own handle, their lips did not touch the same surface.

The Lambeth ware, of which we found fragments, was of a character different from either of those above mentioned. It was more closely allied to Delft ware, being of a rough substance, coated with white glaze, perhaps prepared from tin, through which the clay shows up almost of a pale salmon tint. The glaze itself is so lightly attached to the paste that it will fly like glass, when pressed, driving any one who tries to mend it almost to distraction.

The factory was started by some Dutch potters about 1650, and continued for about a century. One platter which was found was so rude as to point to an early date. Lambeth could turn out much better work than this, and among the fragments we found there was evidence of power of design as well as of colour.

The last stoneware we have is either of Fulham or German manufacture, and of this we found several pieces. It is so hard that it comes out of the ground, after being buried for two hundred years, almost as fresh as when it came from the hands of the potter. If we assume it to be the former, its history is as follows:—

In 1671, one John Dwight, M.A., Christ Church, Oxon, established this factory with a view to making porcelain, of which indeed Chaffers speaks of him as the inventor

PLATE V.

*To face p. 10.*



Fragments of Greybeards or Bellarmines, and large Mask.



Three-legged Pipkin or Cooking-pot, 17th century.



in England. The ware we have before us is an imitation of those jugs we have spoken of already.

It was called Grès de Cologne, and is notable for the extraordinary hardness of its glaze.

And now with an apology to the reader for these digressions, I return to the more important work of the excavations.

We cannot be said at first to have experienced any intense amount of sympathy. There is a thoroughfare through the Quad. in which we were busy, and the passers by were not slow to pass their comments, alike on us and our labours. "*A mere piece of antiquarian folly*," sniffed a cleric, as he passed on his way, perhaps to sit and smoke at ease in the Union, and discuss the last news of the Dreyfus trial, or the telegrams from the Transvaal.

"*Sind Sie in Pompeii gewesen, Doctor? Ach wohl, it remindz me of zat.*" Such was the comment of a portly German, beaming on our work through his spectacles. "*I guess I'll give you £5,*" drawls out an American, "*for all you get out of that hole.*" "*Well,*" retorts one of our party, from the top of a high heap of earth, "*there is the bastion; you may have that, if you can take it away.*"

In spite of sneering friends and derisive strangers, we set our faces like a flint and pressed on. Bit by bit the grand old city yielded up her long buried secrets, and then, as if determined to punish our presumption, she suddenly presented to us more, far more, than we had looked for. We were seeking *a wall*, we found *many*; we were almost in the position of the man, who, having asked his opponent to define a bee, finds that a hive is turned out upon him. Nevertheless each day brought some new fact to light, and notably with regard to our "finds."

Pupil-work had called me home early one afternoon, and I was deep in the mysteries of a Greek play, when a ring came at the door, and an excited member of our band arrived to announce that, just after I had left, they had struck on a vein of treasures. And so it proved, for when



I went down next morning, there was a goodly show. Jars, glass bottles, two tygs, the remains of a three-legged cooking-pot (see Plate V.), and what seemed a dish for bleeding. This last, coupled with our earlier discovery of the white basin, which may have been used for shaving, and would then have had a circular space for the neck to fit into, leads me to think that we had struck into the dust-heap of a barber-surgeon's house (see Plate VI.).

This theory met with a singular confirmation soon after, for we found a small piece of metal, about the size of a threepenny piece, and stamped W. B. This, on being taken to the Bodleian, was pronounced by Mr. Madan to be a "token" of one William Bailey, and on closer examination it proved to have, on the other side, a pestle and mortar. That day was the most fruitful in "finds," for not long after we unearthed a Bellarmine jug, as perfect as the day it left the factory (see Plate IV.). There it lay, reposing on its clayey bed, just as it had sunk to its rest between two and three centuries ago. What toppers they must have been, judging from the fragments of cups, bottles and jugs we find! In fact, I may mention, that pipes and these eating and drinking vessels were found in greater profusion than almost anything else.

To eat, to drink, to smoke,—such was the order of the day, apparently, two centuries ago, and then, I am afraid, to quarrel; or, if not, how can we explain the vicinity of the barber-surgeon to these signs of festivity? No such name as Bailey is marked on our plan of the houses. Can it be that he lodged with Mr. Wildgoos, and that when that worthy and Mr. Cuckoo had over-night applied "hot and rebellious liquors to their blood," he was called in in the morning to alleviate their fever by judicious blood-letting, or, as it was called in those days, "Phlebotomy?"

The three-legged pot or pipkin was more interesting perhaps to a collector than to the general public; it had a hollow handle, into which a stick or iron rod could be inserted, for in those days pots stood not only *on* but *in* the



PLATE VI.

*To face p. 12.*



White Shaving Basin (Lambeth, about 1650)  
Bleeding Dish and Plate, 17th century.



View of Excavations. Beneath the X we made our largest number of "finds."



fire and the fingers of the cook must be spared in lifting it off the fire (see Plate V.).

There must have been "winged words" in Mr. Wildgoos's kitchen, when this fine pot was broken. Perhaps it was a mere accident, or may it have been used in a midnight brawl, after a lengthened drinking bout, as a weapon of offence? In which case, if it descended on Mr. Cuckoo's head, perhaps it may account for his disappearance from the pages of history!

This pipkin proved one of the most difficult pieces to mend, for not only was much of it missing, but the thirsty clay drank in the glue like water. At last it was accomplished, and even then had to be strengthened with a lining of oil silk and paper to allow of its being lifted by the handle.

But while some have been measuring, others photographing and mending, time has been running on, and I could hardly believe my ears, when in Committee, with Mr. Madan in the chair, we were told that as we had now been a *month* at work, time and the funds at our disposal alike admonished us to draw to a close in a week or ten days.

And here perhaps I ought to mention that just before we finished, from a great depth, close down by one of the oldest walls, presumably that of Robert D'Oyly, were dug up the only human remains we found.

How strange to chance last of all upon these remnants of one who had<sup>?</sup> lived and moved so many centuries ago! We had up till then been finding our way through the remains of quiet home life, or the roystering days of the Cavaliers. Now we were face to face with a tragedy in some form.

Can these have been the bones of some Saxon serf, who, as he worked at the wall, too lazily for the impatience of his Norman lord, was struck down by the "mailed fist" to rise no more, or was he one of the many victims of the "black death," pitched over the wall to save burial, and sinking deep into the ooze and slush of the City ditch?

Who shall say? Coming as it did at the end of our pleasant spell of work, it seemed to remind us of the Egyptians' mummy, dragged in at the close of one of their banquets.

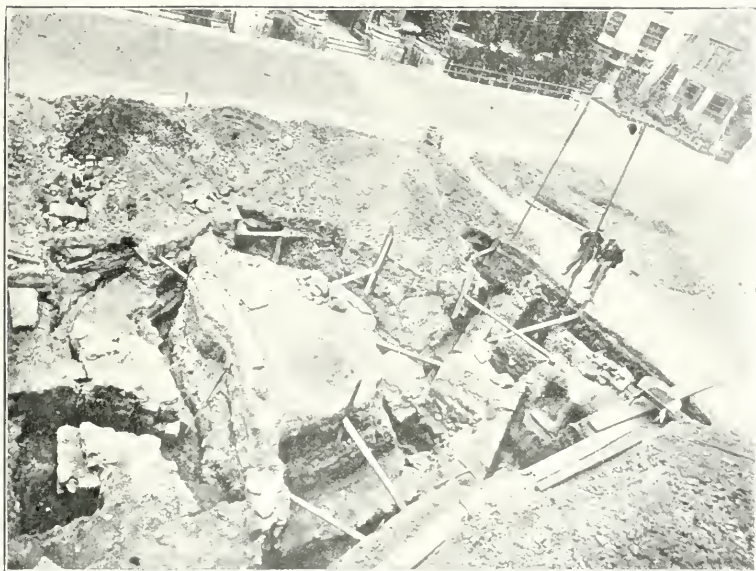
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And now, sad as it always is to quit a labour of love, since the end must come, I will try to set down in a few words what we have learned from our five weeks' labours. And here I must express my great obligations to Mr. Hurst for permission to use his notes, without which, I fear, my account would have been most defective.

In these he tells us that the result of the entire work has been to find the remains of two City walls and to develop a bastion, apparently built against a wall running almost diagonally across the quad. This wall, trending N.E. towards the Lady Chapel, which I have previously mentioned, was from 6 ft. to 7 ft. 8 in. thick; the walls of the bastion were 5 ft. thick, and on each side there was a room, exterior to the city, and probably of later date than the bastion itself, which we may place in Henry 3rd's time.

The doorway and passage into the West Chamber were clearly a modification of older work, added in one part, hacked away in another. The opening into the bastion was but two feet wide, but the indentations for two gudgeons or door-hooks were very plain, so that this narrow opening was protected by two narrow doors. There were bits of good Ashlar framing to it and the floor of the passage was blackened. Inside the bastion was a more modern fireplace, built of bricks, which were considered too thick for the Tudor period.

In the S.W. corner of the Quad. and east of this bastion, there were many remains of foundations of houses (it was here our friend Mr. Wildgoos lived), and the original wall had been "pulled," that is, robbed of its stones to be used for other purposes, and thinned down in many places.



View of the discovered City Wall, from above.  
(The black lines show its course to the Lady Chapel.)



Junction of Henry III.'s with D'Oyley's wall, shewing herring-bone foundation-stones of latter.





Another portion of a wall of peculiar character, worked that is upon large stones, laid in herring-bone fashion, commences south of the main wall, at a short distance from the east flank of the bastion, and runs almost in the direction of Hertford College (see Plate VII.). This, on being investigated, seemed at first to turn round on a curve to the S.E., and consequently to be out of reach of the excavators: it now seems to lead in a more easterly direction, so that there is little doubt that we have on this spot a double wall to the City, and it is not clear whether either of them is of the same age as the wall in New College gardens.

The one nearest to the Old Schools, besides having its face very much sloped, has its south side left in a very rough state, as if built against a mound of earth; the one running diagonally across the quadrangle is of too good workmanship on both faces to match the wall usually assigned to Henry 3rd.

The above scanty extracts do very sorry justice to Mr. Hurst's valuable notes, but they contain as much as is likely to be of interest to the general reader.

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The autumn days are beginning to draw in; round the table in the Quad. at which we have worked so many hours, and on which the summer sun used to pour down its heat, the breezes of "Chill October" now toss the dead leaves; the very walls, which then radiated heat from every pore, are now fringed with the dainty filigree of the hoar frost, and across that space so full of ancient memories, before many days are over, will resound the echo of young feet, and the laugh of the "freshman" in all the enjoyment of his first term.

*"Forsan et haec olim meminisse juvabit."*

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